

# SWEDEN 2021 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Kingdom of Sweden is a constitutional monarchy with a freely elected multiparty parliamentary form of government. Legislative authority rests in the unicameral parliament (Riksdag). Observers considered the general elections in 2018 to be free and fair. In 2019 a center-left coalition led by Stefan Lofven of the Social Democratic Party assumed office. Lofven lost a vote of no confidence in June but returned as prime minister in July. The king is largely a symbolic head of state. The prime minister is the head of government and exercises executive authority.

The national police are responsible for law enforcement and general order within the country. The Security Service is responsible for national security related to terrorism, extremism, and espionage. The Ministry of Justice provides funding and letters of instruction for both branches of the police's activities, but it does not control how police perform them. According to the constitution, all branches of police are independent authorities. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were no reports that members of security forces committed abuses.

Significant issues included the existence of criminal libel laws.

The government had mechanisms in place to identify and punish officials who may commit human rights abuses.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person**

### **a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings**

There were no reports that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

## **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

## **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

The constitution and law prohibit such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

There were no significant reports regarding prison or detention center conditions that raised human rights concerns.

**Physical Conditions:** In its most recent report on prison conditions released on September 9, the Council of Europe’s Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) observed regarding COVID-19 a “lack of systematic testing of both the detained persons (and patients) and staff, and...most of the staff did not wear masks even when in close contact with persons deprived of their liberty.” It stated that these practices “exposed persons deprived of their liberty (including psychiatric patients), many of whom had health conditions making them more vulnerable, to the avoidable degree of risk of getting very ill and maybe even dying of COVID-19.” Prisoners had “an only limited choice between exposure or lack of exposure to the infection risk.”

**Administration:** Authorities conducted investigations of credible allegations of mistreatment.

**Independent Monitoring:** The government permitted monitoring by independent, nongovernmental observers. On September 9, the CPT published the report of its delegation’s visit to the country on January 18-29.

## **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government generally observed these requirements.

## **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

The law requires warrants based on evidence and issued by duly authorized officials for arrests. Police must file charges within six hours against persons detained for disturbing public order or considered dangerous and within 12 hours against those detained on other grounds. Police may hold a person six hours for questioning or as long as 12 hours without a court order if deemed necessary for the investigation. After questioning, authorities must either arrest or release an individual, based on the level of suspicion. If a suspect is arrested, the prosecutor has 24 hours (or three days in exceptional circumstances) to request continued detention. Authorities must arraign an arrested suspect within 48 hours and begin initial prosecution within two weeks unless there are extenuating circumstances. Authorities generally respected these requirements.

In its September 9 report, the CPT expressed concern that, despite authorities' assurances to the contrary, notification of custody of detainees was frequently delayed, often until the first court hearing and sometimes up to the full four days in police custody. Police officers with whom the CPT delegation spoke confirmed this was routine practice and expressed their belief that the matter lay with the senior investigators or prosecutors in charge of a case.

Although there is no system of bail, courts routinely released defendants pending trial unless authorities considered them dangerous, had reason to believe they would tamper with witnesses or evidence, or believed the suspect might leave the country. Since July 1, the law limits pretrial detention to a maximum of three months for minors and nine months for adults; previously the law set no time restrictions for detention. The law affords detainees prompt access to lawyers. The CPT report noted that access to legal counsel at times was delayed and little changed since the last report in 2015. A suspect has a right to legal representation when the prosecutor requests his detention beyond 24 hours (or three days in exceptional circumstances). Detainees may retain a lawyer of their choice. In criminal cases the government is obligated to provide an attorney, regardless of the defendant's financial situation.

Restrictive conditions for prisoners held in pretrial custody remained a problem, although the law includes the possibility of appealing a decision to impose specific

restrictions to the court of appeals and ultimately to the Supreme Court. Restrictions can be imposed on detainee's rights to be held with other detainees, interact with others, follow events in the outside world, be in the possession of newspapers and magazines, see visitors, communicate with others by electronic means, and send or receive mail. Such restrictions may only be applied if there is a risk that a suspect will tamper with evidence or otherwise impede the investigation of the matter at issue.

By law a detainee not under restriction has the right to be with others during daytime hours. According to the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, 72 percent of those who ended a pretrial custody sometime during 2020 had been under some restriction at the beginning of their custody. The Swedish Prison and Probation Service failed to provide 32 percent of persons held in pretrial custody in 2020 with at least two hours per day of meaningful social interaction, which is the UN minimum. COVID-19 measures limited visits during the year. The service allowed for video meetings and free or reduced costs for telephone calls to compensate for limited visits. According to the CPT, the percentage of remand prisoners on restriction was between 55 percent and 65 percent, essentially unchanged since 2015. The government reimbursed defendants found not guilty for damages suffered during pretrial detention.

### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, and the government generally respected judicial independence and impartiality.

#### **Trial Procedures**

The constitution provides for the right to a fair and public trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right.

Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence, have a right to be informed promptly and in detail of the charges against them, and have a right to a fair, timely, public trial. Cases of a sensitive nature, including those involving children, rape, and national security, may be closed to the public. Defendants may be present at their trial. Defendants have the right to consult an attorney of their choice. In criminal cases the government is obligated to provide a defense

attorney. Prisoners always have the right to meet their lawyers in private. Defendants generally have adequate time and facilities to prepare their defense, with free language interpretation as required, from the moment the defendant is charged through all appeals. Defendants may confront or question prosecution or plaintiff witnesses, and present witnesses and evidence on their own behalf. They may not be compelled to testify or confess guilt. If convicted, defendants have the right to appeal.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

### **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

Individuals and organizations may seek civil remedies for human rights violations in the general court system. Citizens may appeal cases involving alleged violations of the European Convention on Human Rights by the government to the European Court of Human Rights.

### **Property Seizure and Restitution**

The government did not confiscate property belonging to Jews, Roma, or other groups targeted by Nazi Germany during the Holocaust era, and Jewish and human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported no disputes related to restitution.

The Department of State's Justice for Uncompensated Survivors Today (JUST) Act report to Congress, released publicly in July 2020, can be found on the Department's website: <https://www.state.gov/reports/just-act-report-to-congress/>.

### **f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The constitution and law prohibit such actions, and there were no reports that the government failed to respect these prohibitions.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media**

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, and the government generally respected this right. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to promote freedom of expression, including for members of the media.

**Freedom of Expression:** The law criminalizes expression considered to be hate speech and prohibits threats or statements of contempt for a group or member of a group based on race, color, national or ethnic origin, religious belief, or sexual orientation. Penalties for hate speech range from fines to a maximum of four years in prison. In addition, the country's courts have held that it is illegal to wear xenophobic symbols or racist paraphernalia or to display signs and banners with inflammatory symbols at rallies.

**Freedom of Expression for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media:** The law criminalizing hate speech applies as well to print and broadcast media, the publication of books, and online newspapers and journals.

**Libel/Slander Laws:** Defamation is a criminal offense punishable by fines or a maximum of two years in prison in the case of gross defamation. A prosecutor may bring a case for insulting behavior towards a person on account of his or her exercise of public authority or related to race, color, national or ethnic origin, religious belief, sexual orientation, or transgender identity or expression. There were no reports of criminal prosecutions for defamation.

**Nongovernmental Impact:** Journalists were subjected to harassment and intimidation, mostly online and on social media. A survey showed that in the previous three years, 70 percent of journalists had experienced insults, 40 percent experienced slander, and 23 percent had been exposed to harassment and unlawful threats.

In April a court sentenced two Russian citizens from Chechnya to lengthy prison

terms for their roles in the attempted killing in 2020 of blogger Tumso Abdurakhmanov, who had been critical of authorities in Chechnya. In May, Foreign Minister Ann Linde summoned the Russian ambassador to request information on Chechen authorities' involvement in the murder attempt. She released a statement about the incident stating, "It is unacceptable that state actors participate in crime in Sweden."

## **Internet Freedom**

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content, and there were no credible reports that the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority.

## **Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

There were no government restrictions on academic freedom or cultural events.

## **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

The constitution provides for the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association, and the government generally respected these rights.

## **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

## **d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country**

The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights.

The government did not bar the repatriation of Swedish citizens held in camps in northeastern Syria but neither did it facilitate their return. On May 26, Human Rights Watch criticized the government for not repatriating 65 to 75 Swedish citizens held in camps in northeastern Syria. The report stated that the government had already repatriated seven persons from Syria. In September the government accepted three women and six children after Kurdish authorities expelled them.

The Kurdish-led civilian administration in northeast Syria stated 16 Swedish citizens had been repatriated.

### **e. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons**

Not applicable.

### **f. Protection of Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers as well as other persons of concern.

**Access to Asylum:** The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. Applicants may appeal unfavorable asylum decisions.

**Safe Country of Origin/Transit:** In accordance with EU regulations, the government denied asylum to persons who had previously registered in another EU or Schengen member state or in countries with which the government maintained reciprocal return agreements. The Migration Agency has produced a list of countries that, in addition to EU member states, are considered safe countries of origin for asylum seekers based on EU rules.

**Durable Solutions:** The government accepted refugees for resettlement from third countries and facilitated local integration (including naturalization). The government assisted the safe, voluntary return of refugees to their homes.

**Temporary Protection:** The government also provided various forms of temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees and as of November 1, provided subsidiary protection to 405 persons.

### **g. Stateless Persons**

According to UNHCR, 50,414 stateless persons were in the country at the end of December 2020. The large number of stateless persons was due to the influx of migrants and refugees and the birth of children to stateless parents who remained

stateless until either one parent acquired citizenship or a special application for citizenship (available for stateless children under the age of five) was made.

Stateless persons who are granted permanent residence can obtain citizenship through the same naturalization process as other permanent residents. Gaining citizenship generally took four to eight years, depending on the individual's grounds for residency, ability to establish identity, and lack of a criminal record.

### **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The constitution provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage.

#### **Elections and Political Participation**

**Recent Elections:** Observers considered the general elections held in 2018 to be free and fair.

**Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups:** No laws limit participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate.

### **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, and the government generally implemented the law effectively. There were isolated reports of government corruption.

### **Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on

human rights cases. Government officials often were cooperative and responsive to their views.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The country had nine national ombudsmen: four justice ombudsmen; the chancellor of justice; the children’s ombudsman; the consumer ombudsman; the child and school student ombudsman; and the equality ombudsman with responsibility for ethnicity, gender, transgender identity, religion, age, sexual orientation, and disabilities. There were normally ombudsmen at the municipal level as well. The ombudsmen enjoyed the government’s cooperation and operated without government or party interference. They had adequate resources, and observers considered them generally effective.

## **Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses**

### **Women**

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** Rape of both women and men, including spousal rape, and domestic violence are illegal, and the government enforced the law effectively. Penalties for violations range from two to 10 years in prison.

The National Council for Crime Prevention (NCCP) reported 9,577 cases of rape in 2020, an increase of approximately 9 percent from 2019. Women and girls were victims in 93 percent of the cases. Domestic violence remained a problem, and 16,616 cases between adults were reported during 2020, a 58 percent increase from 2019. Of these, 13,616 (82 percent) were violence against women.

The law provides for the protection of survivors from contact with their abusers. When necessary, authorities helped survivors to protect their identities or to obtain new identities and homes. Both national and local governments helped fund volunteer groups that provided shelter and other assistance for abused women.

**Other Harmful Traditional Practices:** Honor-related violence often involved immigrants from the Middle East or South Asia. The national support line for those who need advice in situations concerning honor-related violence reported a decrease from 1,019 cases involving 1,054 suspected victims in 2019 to 784 cases involving 907 suspected victims in 2020. The calls mostly concerned child or forced marriage, abduction or being held abroad, or female genital mutilation or

cutting (FGM/C).

**Sexual Harassment:** The law prohibits sexual harassment and provides for criminal penalties ranging from a fine to up to two years in prison. The government generally enforced this law.

**Reproductive Rights:** There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

NGOs the Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU) and Never Forget Pela and Fadime reported on virginity testing and hymenoplasty done by some private medical practitioners. The government condemned these practices and stated they were not compatible with health and medical care legislation.

The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence. Emergency contraception was available as part of clinical management of rape.

**Discrimination:** Women have the same legal status and rights as men, including under family, religious, personal status, labor, property, nationality, and inheritance law. The government enforced the laws effectively.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

The constitution charges public institutions with promoting equality in society and combating discrimination. The constitution prohibits unfavorable treatment of anyone based on ethnic origin, color, or other similar circumstances, and the government generally respected these rights.

Societal discrimination and violence against Roma continued to be a problem.

Police registered reports of xenophobic crimes, some of which were linked to neo-Nazi or white supremacy ideology. Police investigated and the district attorney's office prosecuted race-related crimes. The Security Service concluded that right-wing extremism was on the rise in the country: right-wing propaganda spread more widely, and more individuals were attracted to it. Neo-Nazi groups operated legally (see section 2.a.). The Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) was the largest white supremacy group with approximately 160 active members. The

NRM registered as a political party and participated in the parliamentary and local elections in 2018 but did not win any seats.

There were problems around vulnerable EU citizens, the vast majority of whom were Roma from Romania and Bulgaria, who resided in the country. As EU citizens, they are allowed to stay in the country without permission for no more than three months, but authorities did not enforce this limit.

The country's official minority languages are all varieties of Finnish, Yiddish, Meankieli, Romani Chib, and Sami. During the year the government supported 38 projects with 3.5 million kronor (\$410,000) in grants, including a digital platform for culture (Yiddish), a language learning page on Facebook (Meankieli), creative writing (Finnish), digital tools for language promotion for youths (Romani Chib), and a language and sports camp for youths (Sami).

Basic training for police officers included training on identifying and investigating hate crimes. Emergency call responders were continuously trained in identifying hate crime motives in crime reports. Police cooperated with Victim Support Sweden, which helps and supports victims, witnesses, and others affected by crime.

Police in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmo have democracy and anti-hate-crime groups. The National Center for Preventing Violent Extremism under the auspices of the NCCP serves as a clearinghouse for information, best practices, and support of municipalities, agencies, and other actors.

## **Indigenous Peoples**

The constitution charges public institutions with promoting opportunities for the Sami people and ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities to preserve and develop a cultural and social life of their own. The approximately 20,000 Sami in the country are full citizens with the right to vote in elections and participate in the government, including as members of the country's parliament. They are not, however, represented as a group in parliament. A 31-member elected administrative authority called the Sami parliament (Sametinget) also represented Sami. The Sami parliament acts as an advisory body to the government and has limited decision-making powers in matters related to preserving the Sami culture,

language, and schooling. The national parliament and government regulations govern the Sami parliament's operations.

Longstanding tensions between the Sami and the government over land and natural resources persisted, as did tensions between the Sami and private landowners over reindeer grazing rights. Certain Sami have grazing and fishing rights, depending on their history. On November 3, the government announced the creation of a truth commission to chart and investigate policies – including “abuses, rights violations and racism” – affecting the Sami. Another task of the commission is to spread awareness of Sami history and how past abuses affect the Sami people today.

## **Children**

**Birth Registration:** Citizenship is derived from one's parents. The tax authority immediately registered in the national population register all children born in the country, regardless of their parents' citizenship or immigration or residency status in the country.

**Child Abuse:** The law prohibits parents or other caretakers from abusing children mentally or physically. Penalties range from a fine up to 10 years in prison. Cases of child abuse were reported. Authorities may remove abused children from their homes and place them in foster care. Rape of a child carries a penalty of two to 10 years in prison.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The minimum age of marriage is 18, and it is illegal for anyone under 18 to marry. The government legally recognizes as valid the marriage of anyone who comes to the country after the age of 18, even if they were married abroad before the age of 18. The government does not recognize a foreign child marriage if either of the parties was a Swedish citizen or resident in Sweden at the time of marriage. Compelling or allowing a child to marry is punishable by up to two years in prison. Municipalities' social welfare services can petition administrative courts to issue travel restrictions to protect at-risk children from being taken out of the country for marriage. Such children are not to be issued passports, and passports that were issued are to be rescinded. The law makes it a crime to take a child who is subject to travel restrictions out of the

country, with punishment of up to two years in prison for violations.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The law criminalizes “contact with children under 15 for sexual purposes,” including internet contact intended to lead to sexual assault. Penalties range from fines to one year in prison. The law prohibits the sale of children; penalties range from two to 10 years in prison. It also bans child pornography with penalties ranging from fines to six years in prison. Authorities enforced the law. The minimum age for consensual sex is 15.

**International Child Abductions:** The country is a party to the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. See the Department of State’s *Annual Report on International Parental Child Abduction* at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/International-Parental-Child-Abduction/for-providers/legal-reports-and-data/reported-cases.html>.

## **Anti-Semitism**

Leaders of the Jewish community estimated there were 15,000 Jews in the country and approximately 6,000 registered members of Jewish congregations. The NCCP registered 280 anti-Semitic crimes in 2018, compared with 182 in 2016. Anti-Semitic crimes accounted for 4 percent of all reported hate crimes. Anti-Semitic crimes included threats, verbal abuse, vandalism, graffiti, harassment in schools, and Holocaust denial. Anti-Semitic incidents were often perpetrated by groups associated with neo-Nazi movements or corresponded with events in the Middle East. Swedish Jews were often targeted for actions of the Israeli government.

The most commonly reported incidents of anti-Semitism were hate speech (45 percent of complaints), unlawful threats or harassment (34 percent), vandalism or graffiti (8 percent), and defamation (8 percent). Of the 182 investigations opened in 2016, 52 percent were dismissed; 37 percent were directly dismissed without a formal investigation due to lack of evidence. Formal charges were brought in 9 percent of the cases.

On January 26 – the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day – four anti-Semitic acts of vandalism took place at the Linköping City Hall and at three media outlets in Linköping and Norrköping, small cities approximately 120 and 100 miles from Stockholm, respectively. The perpetrators plastered anti-Semitic messages

and Stars of David on building facades and left behind cans of an unidentified powder. The Linköping police opened four investigations into incitement against ethnic groups. Also on January 26, the words “the Holocaust is a hoax” were projected onto a crane in Gothenburg, the country’s second largest city, for about 10 minutes. Gothenburg police confirmed on January 28 that they had initiated an investigation into the incident.

On May 12, a man was arrested on suspicion of hate speech after singing the anti-Semitic Khaybar chant at a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Malmö. In May a 12-year-old Jewish girl filed a police report concerning anti-Semitic harassment to which she had been subjected by schoolmates in a Malmö school. On May 26, a non-Jewish man wearing a kippah was assaulted by several men and was called “Jewish bastard” by at least one of them in Gothenburg.

On March 27, the first night of Passover, baby dolls splashed with red paint were strung outside a synagogue in Norrköping, next to a flyer with anti-Semitic messages. The Norrköping police opened a hate crime investigation on March 28.

Police, politicians, media, and Jewish groups have stated that anti-Semitism has been especially prevalent in Malmö. In March the Malmö Municipality published a report on anti-Semitism in schools where all 26 staff and 14 Jewish students interviewed said they had experienced anti-Semitism in Malmö schools and kindergartens. School staff identified anti-Semitic expressions in Malmö’s schools that were connected to the Israel-Palestine conflict, geopolitical relations in the Middle East, and pan-Arabic nationalism.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center left in place its travel advisory, first issued in 2010, regarding travel in southern Sweden, because Jews in Malmö could be “subject to anti-Semitic taunts and harassment.”

In January Prime Minister Löfven announced that Sweden would assume the presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) starting in March 2022. On October 13, the government hosted the Malmö International Forum on Holocaust Remembrance and Combating Antisemitism, marking the 20th anniversary of the Stockholm Declaration that created the IHRA, with over 300 participants including Holocaust survivors, high-ranking representatives from

more than 35 countries, and leaders of civil society organizations. Forum participants criticized social media platforms for not better policing anti-Semitic hate speech online.

During the year a Jewish neurosurgeon at Nya Karolinska University Hospital (NKS) reported continuing reprisals stemming from his 2017 report that the hospital's chief of neurosurgery subjected him and two other Jewish colleagues to anti-Semitic harassment and discrimination. In June the Equality Ombudsman concluded its third inquiry into the doctor's allegation and found its inquiry did not substantiate the allegations that the NKS violated the law's prohibition on retaliation. In December 2020 the Health and Social Care Inspectorate rejected a formal complaint made in 2019 by the NKS that the doctor posed a risk to patient safety and rebuked the NKS for identifying the doctor's religion in its complaint.

The Living History Forum is a public authority commissioned to address societal problems related to religious and ethnic tolerance, democracy, and human rights, using the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity as its starting point. The forum sensitized the public, and particularly the young, to the need to respect the equal value of all persons, with a specific focus on teaching about the Holocaust as a means of fighting Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism.

The Media Council, a government agency whose primary task is to train minors to be conscious media users and to protect them from harmful media influences, initiated a "No Hate Speech Movement" campaign and worked to stop anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. The government allocated six million kronor (\$706,000) to the Swedish Committee against Anti-Semitism and the Living History Forum to increase opportunities for student and teacher study visits to Holocaust memorial sites. On March 18, the government stated that two million kronor (\$235,000) of these funds were earmarked for planning and preparation for resuming remembrance trips to the Holocaust memorial sites for high school students and teachers after trips were canceled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

Persons with disabilities were able to access health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. Government regulations require new buildings and public facilities to be fully accessible. The government enforced these provisions. Observers reported cases of insufficient access to privately owned buildings used by the public, such as apartments, restaurants, and bars. Some means of public transportation remained inaccessible.

In 2020 the Equality Ombudsman received 916 reports concerning discrimination related to disability, of which 372 concerned a lack of accessibility. The complaints were mainly about perceived discrimination in working life, education, social services, and trade in goods and services. A large proportion of the complaints concerned the lack of reasonable accommodations in the workplace. In the education system, many cases concerned children and young persons with reading and writing difficulties not receiving sufficient support at school. In the case of trade in goods and services, many of the cases concerned access to premises or services and inadequate communication tools. The NGO Antidiscrimination Agency Norra Skane, the NGO Malmo against Discrimination, and an individual who had been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome sued the Swedish Armed Forces in the autumn of 2020 because the military was denying persons with neuropsychiatric disabilities access to basic military training. The armed forces stated these diagnoses were not compatible with military activities, due to the requirements and the environment in which the individual would work; it paid a fine to the plaintiff.

According to the Agency for Participation, the level of education was lower among persons with disabilities than among others in the population. Its reports showed that two reasons were that special support was provided too late and that students with disabilities felt more insecure. Among 30- to 64-year-olds with disabilities, 33 percent had postsecondary education compared with 47 percent for the rest of the population. Within the group of persons with disabilities between the ages of 20 and 36, 9 percent had dropped out of upper secondary school, compared with 3 percent in the rest of the population. In 2019 just over 11,100 students with disabilities attended compulsory special school, just over 6,000 attended upper secondary special school, and 659 students with disabilities attended special

resource school. In November the Supreme Court ordered the city of Malmo to pay fines of 20,000 kronor (\$2,350) to a student for discrimination based on the student's disability when a municipal school did not provide the student sufficient assistance within a reasonable time span. Disability NGOs noted the judgment was one of the first of its kind in the country.

The Agency for Participation noted that some polling stations in the general election of 2018 were inaccessible for persons with disabilities. In the 2018 elections, 84 percent of persons with disabilities voted, compared with 91 percent in the rest of the population.

### **Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity**

The law prohibits discrimination by state and nonstate actors against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons. The government generally enforced such laws.

### **Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

Societal discrimination and violence against immigrants continued to be a problem.

Several districts in the country where most of the population was of immigrant origin or parentage suffered social segregation from the rest of the country. The result was lower levels of education, higher levels of unemployment, and separation from the country's mainstream culture, mainly due to poor Swedish-language skills.

In 2018 the NCCP identified 7,090 police reports with a hate-crime motive, a majority of which had xenophobic motives. Of the reports, 8 percent were anti-Muslim. Anti-Christian and other antireligious hate crimes accounted for 4 percent each.

For 2020 and 2021, the government allocated 22 million kronor (\$2.6 million) for grants to increase security for threatened places of worship and other parts of civil society and announced an allocation of 34 million kronor (\$4 million) for 2022. All religious communities and civil society actors who believe they have been

threatened may apply for the grant. In 2020 a total of 17.3 million kronor (\$2 million) was allocated for security measures in 10 different faith communities. Of the amount, 83 percent was granted to Jewish communities, organizations and museums, schools, and elderly care facilities.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law provides for the right of workers to form and join independent unions, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and provides for protection of workers from being fired because of union activity. If a court finds a dismissal to be unlawful, the employee has the right to reinstatement. The government effectively enforced the law and penalties were commensurate with those for similar crimes.

Foreign companies may be exempt from collective bargaining, provided they meet minimum working conditions and levels of pay. Public-sector employees enjoy the right to strike, subject to limitations in the collective agreements protecting the public's immediate health and security. The government mediation service may also intervene to postpone a strike for up to 14 days for mediation. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) claimed the law restricts the rights of the country's trade unions to take industrial action on behalf of foreign workers in foreign companies operating in the country. The law allows unions to conduct their activities largely without interference.

The government effectively enforced applicable laws. The Labor Court settles any dispute that affects the relationship between employers and employees. An employer organization, an employee organization, or an employer who has entered into a collective agreement on an individual basis may lodge claims. The Labor Court may impose prison sentences commensurate with those for similar violations. Administrative and judicial procedures were not subject to lengthy delays and appeals.

Workers and employers exercised all legal collective bargaining rights, which the government protected. The government and employers respected freedom of

association and the right to collective bargaining. ITUC reported no serious violations of worker rights in 2020 and from January to June 2021.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, including by children, and the government effectively enforced the law. Penalties of imprisonment were generally commensurate with those for similar serious crimes. Forced labor involving adult trafficking victims occurred in agriculture (including involving companies providing foreign labor for berry picking), construction, hospitality, domestic work, forced begging, and theft, and there were reports of forced begging involving child trafficking victims (see section 7.c.). In some cases employers or contractors providing labor seized the passports of workers and withheld their pay. Resources and inspections were adequate.

According to the latest government statistics from the NCCP, 196 cases of suspected human trafficking were reported to police in 2020. Of those, 24 concerned adult forced labor, 12 adult forced begging, and 42 other forms. According to the NCCP, there were 79 cases of human exploitation, a complementary crime to human trafficking related to unreasonable working conditions, with 72 cases of human exploitation for adult forced labor and four for human exploitation of adults for the purpose of begging.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

The law prohibits the worst forms of child labor. It permits full-time employment from the age of 16 under the supervision of local authorities. Employees younger than 18 may work only during daytime and under supervision. Children as young as 13 may work part time or perform light work with parental permission. The law limits the types of work in which children may or may not engage. For instance, a child may not work with dangerous machinery or chemicals. A child may also not work alone or be responsible for handling cash transactions. The law considers a violation of these limits a civil rather than a criminal violation. According to the

law, forcing a child to work may be treated as coercion, deprivation of liberty, or child abuse, and it carries a wide range of penalties, including fines and imprisonment. The government effectively implemented these laws and regulations. Criminal penalties were commensurate with those for other serious crimes, such as kidnapping, and inspection was sufficient to enforce compliance.

According to the most recent government statistics from the NCCP, 196 cases of suspected human trafficking were reported to police in 2020. For children, there were 15 cases of child sex trafficking, five cases of child forced labor, one case of child forced begging, one case of forced child war service, and 25 cases of other forms of child trafficking.

Boys were mainly subjected to forced begging and forced petty theft. Girls were mainly subjected to sexual exploitation, forced begging, and child marriage. Police and social services reportedly acted promptly when cases were reported.

#### **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation**

The law prohibits discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on religion, sex, ethnicity (including race, national origin, color, and in some cases refugee status), disability (including HIV/AIDS status), age, and sexual orientation or gender identity. The government effectively enforced applicable law, and penalties were commensurate with similar violations. The law requires equal pay for equal work. The government effectively enforced the law prohibiting gender discrimination by investigating and prosecuting complaints.

The equality ombudsman investigated complaints of gender discrimination in the labor market. In 2020 the ombudsman received 988 complaints of discrimination in the labor market, of which 431 were related to gender and 145 to disabilities. The World Economic Forum estimated that earned income for women was less than that for men. Of the complaints of ethnic discrimination to the equality ombudsman, 555 involved the labor market. Complaints may also be filed with the courts or with the employer. Labor unions generally mediated in cases filed with the employer.

## **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

**Wage and Hour Laws:** There is no national minimum wage law. Annual collective bargaining agreements set wages within industries, which were greater than the poverty income level. By regulation, both foreign and domestic employers must offer conditions of employment on par with the country's collective agreements. Nonunion establishments generally observed these contracts as well.

The labor law and collective bargaining agreements regulate overtime and rest periods. The law allows a maximum of 200 hours of overtime annually. Collective agreements determined compensation for overtime, which could take the form of money or time off. The law requires a minimum period of 36 consecutive hours of rest, preferably on weekends, over a seven-day period. The Work Environment Authority effectively enforced wage and hour laws.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were appropriate. The responsibility for identifying unsafe situations remains with OSH experts and not the worker. The Work Environment Authority, a government agency, effectively enforced these standards. In 2020 the authority conducted 17,602 inspections. Inspectors have the authority to conduct unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. The 258 inspectors were sufficient to enforce the law. In 2020 the authority took part in a cross-agency task force that made 1,274 visits to check on work permits, taxes, and working environment regulations. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Work Environment Authority carried out many inspections at a distance via video meetings or telephone. The government tasked the authority with carrying out a targeted supervisory effort focusing on the spread of COVID-19 in primary and secondary schools, grocery and retail stores, transportation, dentist offices, slaughterhouses, cleaning companies, companies that worked with property management, and restaurants that sold takeaway food.

The Work Environment Authority issued occupational health and safety regulations and trained union stewards and safety ombudsmen whom government inspectors monitored. If an employee finds that the work involves immediate and serious danger to life or health, the employee must immediately notify the

employer or safety ombudsman. Workers have the right to remove themselves from unsafe conditions without jeopardy to their employment. Safety ombudsmen have authority to stop unsafe activity immediately and to call in an inspector. An employer may be fined for violating work environment regulations. Penalties were commensurate with those for similar violations.

Foreign seasonal workers, including berry pickers from Asia and Bulgaria, faced poor living and working conditions. The guidelines of the Swedish Retail and Food Federation cover EU citizens who pick berries in the country but not workers from outside the EU. Under the guidelines, berry pickers are to be informed that they have the right to sell their berries to all buyers and that nobody has the right to control how, when, and where they pick wild berries. A foreign company providing berry pickers to a local company must also demonstrate how it expects to pay workers in case of limited work or a bad harvest. The guidelines task food and retail organizations and brokers with ensuring their implementation.

In August approximately 50 Bulgarian berry pickers were stranded in Alvsbyn (450 miles north of Stockholm) when their employer was not present when they arrived, and police determined their vehicles were not fit for legal use. Police started an investigation on human exploitation. The Bulgarian embassy helped 35 of the berry pickers to return to Bulgaria by bus.

The Swedish Construction Workers' Union reported in 2020 that working conditions for foreign workers in the construction sector had deteriorated. In the report, foreign workers said they received lower salaries than their Swedish colleagues and that some employers did not pay taxes or give the foreign workers an official employment contract. The living standards provided by the employer were substandard. There were reports of 20 to 30 workers living in the same apartment and sleeping in shifts.

The Work Environment Authority reported industrial accidents caused the death of 24 workers in 2020, the lowest number recorded in any year since 1955. Ten of the accidents in 2020 were in the construction sector. Construction, transport, and manufacturing were the three sectors with the greatest number of deaths caused by industrial accidents between 2011 and 2020.